

# Violence against women with disabilities

## Rates and types of violence against women with disabilities

- Gender-based and disability-based discrimination increase the risk of violence for women and girls with disabilities.
- Men who use violence often target women who they perceive are less powerful, such as women who are unable to communicate to others what has happened to them, and those restricted in their physical movement.
- Women and girls with disabilities are twice as likely as women and girls without disabilities to experience violence throughout their lives.<sup>1</sup>
- Over one-third of women with disabilities experience some form of intimate partner violence.<sup>2</sup>
- In mental health inpatient services, 45 per cent of women experienced sexual assault and more than 80 per cent lived in fear of being abused, while 67 per cent of women reported harassment during admission.<sup>3</sup>
- Many women experience social isolation as both a risk factor for, and a consequence of, violence. Some perpetrators use social isolation as a form of controlling behaviour in itself.
- Isolation can be compounded for women living rurally or remotely, women who are culturally isolated and for older women (sometimes called Elder Abuse).<sup>4</sup>

“ I want everyone to remember people with disabilities are people of worth. We have a right to be treated with respect. We have a right to safety.”  
Jane, WDV member.

“ If we could change one thing, it should be to make sure that no violence happens and that if it does, people are safe to talk about it.”  
Fiona, WDV member

## Voices Against Violence research

A review of 100 women's files at the [Office of the Public Advocate](#) found:

- 45 of the 100 women reported experiencing violence from a total of 89 perpetrators
- most commonly reported forms of violence were psychological, physical, sexual, controlling behaviour and economic abuse
- impairment-related abuse included withholding medication and disability aids.

These numbers are particularly stark when we consider that violence against women is an under-reported crime.<sup>5</sup>

The [Voices Against Violence Research Project](#) (May 2014) is an investigation of women's experiences of violence and support systems. Its findings inform 21 recommendations for government and services.

See also our Position Paper on Violence Against Women with Disabilities.

Funded by the  
Lord Mayor's  
Charitable Foundation



## Contacts for support and information

**Emergency:** Victoria Police: 000

**Women needing help or referral for family violence crisis:** Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre (24 hour)  
Phone: 1800 015 188  
Email: [safesteps@safesteps.org.au](mailto:safesteps@safesteps.org.au)  
Website: <http://www.safesteps.org.au/>

**Family violence outreach services** support safety planning for safety at home or when planning to leave violence. They also offer secondary consultation. Find your local outreach service:  
<http://www.dvrcv.org.au/prevention/referrals>

**People who have experienced sexual assault:**  
Find the nearest Centre Against Sexual Assault,  
<http://www.casa.org.au/contacts/>

**Or for a 24 hour sexual assault counselling service:**  
Phone: 1800 806 292  
Email: [ahcasa@thewomens.org.au](mailto:ahcasa@thewomens.org.au)  
Website: <http://www.sacl.com.au>

**Men concerned about their behaviour at home:**  
Men's Referral Service  
Phone: 1300 766 491  
Website: <http://mrs.org.au/>

## To prevent and respond to violence...

**Listen to women with disabilities:** women report that the most important help they received was that people listened to them.

**Empower women:** representation of women in staff, on boards and in all levels of decision making is a critical way to reduce discrimination and break down power imbalances.

**Provide accessible information on rights and services:** *"Unless you know the systems you don't know what to ask for and you don't have any power."* Sam, WDV member.

**Find out about services in your area:** we need to work together to remove barriers for women with disabilities to access safety and justice.

**Understand the causes of violence against women with disabilities:** layers of power and discrimination combine with negative stereotypes.

**Address discrimination:** environments and attitudes are often disabling. Take steps to reduce the access barriers that you can see.

## If you are experiencing violence...

*"Go to a... women's organisation (or someone you can trust) that is likely to believe you. 'Cause that's the first thing you want ... There's nothing worse than going to somebody and they don't believe you, and then you often stop there and you don't follow it through. The other thing, for people with disabilities, be strong in yourself and know that what you're feeling, if it's feeling wrong, then it is wrong."* Michelle<sup>6</sup>

## References

- 1 Krnjacki L, Emerson E, Llewellyn G, Kavanagh A: *'Prevalence and risk of violence against people with and without disabilities: Findings from an Australian population-based study'*, Aust NZ J Public Health 2016, 40(1):16-21.
- 2 ibid
- 3 Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC) *'Zero Tolerance for Sexual Assault: A safe admission for women'*, 2013.
- 4 Healey, Lucy. *'Voices Against Violence: Paper 2: Current Issues in Understanding and Responding to Violence Against Women with Disabilities.'* Women with Disabilities Victoria, Office of the Public Advocate, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, 2013.
- 5 ibid
- 6 WWDA, UNSW & PWD, *'Stop the Violence: Improving Service Delivery for Women and Girls with disabilities.'* 2013.

## About Women with Disabilities Victoria

Women with Disabilities Victoria is run by women with disabilities for women with disabilities. Our areas of focus are:

- Empowering women with disabilities
- Advocacy to government and service providers
- Professional education.

For more information contact our office:

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Membership is open to both individuals and to organisations who share our aims, and is free for women with disabilities.  
[www.wdv.org.au/get\\_involved.htm#Membership](http://www.wdv.org.au/get_involved.htm#Membership)